Altoona Middle School

Student Discipline

By: Jamie Oliver

**Rationale**

Discipline at any level can be difficult, but the hope is always that any immediate response we make to the poor behavior of a student is enough to make them think twice about making the same choice again. At Altoona Middle School we are started something called VIC lunch study hall, which stands for Very Important Choices. The nice thing about VIC is that it can be immediate consequence for behavior. A teacher or administrator can place a student in VIC on the very same day as the offense. This aligns with the PBIS, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports model where students are to be given consequences as soon as possible so the choices they have made are still fresh in their mind. While the students are in the VIC room they must complete a short worksheet that asks them why they are in VIC, what consequences it had on others, what could they have done differently, and what may happen if these actions continue. The VIC is supervised by volunteer teachers who get a chance to interact with this student in a one on one discussion.

Another response to behavior at Altoona Middle School is our harassment forms. These forms can be filled out anonymously or signed, but the main purpose is to let the administration know that someone is making the student feel uncomfortable. After the paperwork has been turned into the office, the principal, dean of students, or guidance counselor can investigate the report and follow thru with any necessary consequences for the offender(s).

I have volunteered to collect data from our first semester harassment forms, as well as, the first semester of our VIC lunch detentions. I was able to break down the reasons for the harassment form, grade level of the victims and the students being accused, and the number posted and reported by each student, with the focus on repeat offenses and repeat offenders. I also tabulated all of the data from the VIC room by breaking it into grade levels, students; offense and weather they met the criteria of work done while in VIC. Then I was able to see just how many of the students who may be harassing other students are also in the VIC room on a regular basis. Lastly, I broke down the number of special education students that were responsible for the 2 reports and compared that with the general population of the student body.

**Competencies Met**

I began by collecting all of the forms and sign in sheets from the VIC binder. This consisted of 143 response sheets from the students. I then began breaking down each student that has served a VIC and then recorded the offense that earned them the VIC placement. I also broke the students into two groups, our fifth and sixth graders were one group and our seventh and eighth graders were a second group.

The fifth and sixth grade categories were disrespect, misbehavior, disruptive, fighting, skipping class, tardiness, check in/checkout violation, and bullying. I also looked at the number of males versus females that committed infractions, and the number of special education students that were placed in VIC.

Lastly I was given the opportunity to supervise the VIC study hall for two weeks. It was a very interesting experience and eye opening at times. I really was able to connect with some of the students and learn a lot about them and their personal lives that may lead them into the situations of earning a spot in the VIC room. It just affirms how the home environment has so much impact on kids, even more than we could ever imagine. These students are fighting an uphill battle with parents who are not there for them, who don’t care, or are blaming the school for everything and never taking the ownership of being a parent.

The results for the 5/6 VIC were:

* + 7 out of 38 students received some form of special education services.
  + 32 out of 38 were males.
  + 5 out of 38 students served three or more VIC’s for the semester, making up 37 of the 74 total numbers of VIC’s.

The seventh and eighth grade categories were disrespect, misbehavior, disruptive, fighting, skipping, tardiness, check in/checkout violation, bullying, missing after school study club, and public display of affection.

* 5 out of 33 students received some form of special education services.
* 20 out of 33 were males.
* 12 out of 33 students served three or more VIC’s for the semester, making up 46 of the 69 total number of VIC’s.

The data shows

* **Leadership 2 organization vision**
* **Leadership 6 integrity, ethics, fairness**
* **Leadership 7 safe, effective environment**
* **Leadership 8 discrimination, diversity**
* **Decision Making 8 change process**
* **Decision Making 9 conflict resolution models**
* **School Community 1 school as internal organization**
* **School Community 3 culture, ethnicity attitudes**
* **School Community 7 accountability for progress**
* **Research 1 role in education**
* **Research 3 quantitative data**
* **Research 3 qualitative data**
* **Research 7 data reporting**
* **Research 8 evaluating, applying**
* **Research 9 program evaluation**
* **Learner Centered 1 school culture, climate**
* **Learner Centered 8 communicate vision, mission**
* **Principalship 6 role in student discipline**

The data from the harassment forms was broken into each individual grade level and then separated by the infraction. I also broke down the data into boys versus girls and those students receiving special education services. Lastly, I broke down the data to an exact location where the harassment was taking place. We actually had 76 reports of harassment in the first semester of the school year. The categories that are available for the students to select from are: teasing, pushing, hitting, name calling, spreading rumors, taunting, stealing, and intimidation.

* 12 of 76 reports of teasing
* 9 of 76 reports of pushing
* 5 of 76 reports of hitting
* 34 of 76 reports of name calling
* 7 of 76 reports of spreading rumors
* 5 of 76 reports of taunting
* 1 of 76 reports of stealing
* 3 of 76 reports of intimidation

As far as the location:

* 53 of 76 reports were in the classroom
* 1 of 76 were in the hall
* 13 of 76 were at recess
* 6 of 76 were on the bus
* 3 of 76 were in the lunchroom

Nothing real conclusive came from the data collected. I guess the administration was looking for the huge neon sign to say what would be a major issue in the middle school. The most important part of this data collection is we will use it to compare future data collection, since we had none from previous years.

I did have a very unique opportunity while serving in the office that was directly related to the harassment issue within our district. The incident was in the high school and included a new freshman boy that felt very uncomfortable in school because he was being bullied and harassed by several freshman boys. I actually got to sit down with the boy and his mother to discuss what was exactly happening and plan a course of action. Once we identified who the other boys were and what they were doing I had them fill out a harassment form. The forms are required to be addressed by our principal or a guidance counselor. I then spoke with the freshman teaching staff, the lunch room supervisors, and the guidance department. I told them the concerns the boy and his mother have and what they told me was happening. The staff agreed to keep a close eye on him and would report anything that was along the lines of harassment. The principal then called in the other boys who were harassing the new student and told them that it needed to stop. I followed up with the young boy about two weeks later and he said things were better and that he had found a new group of students to sit by during lunch. It seemed like a positive end to a not so pleasant experience.

* **Leadership 5 change process**
* **Leadership 7 safe, effective environment**
* **Leadership 9 effective communication**
* **Decision Making 2 role of power and influence**
* **Decision Making 5 long range strategic plans**
* **Decision Making 6 problem solving strategies**
* **Decision Making 7 fairness and ethics**
* **Decision Making 9 conflict resolution models**
* **School Law 1 rights and responsibilities of students and staff**
* **School Community 1 school as internal organization**
* **School Community 3 culture, ethnicity attitudes**
* **School Community 4 sensitivity to families**
* **School Community 6 public relations**
* **Research 1 role in education**
* **Research 3 quantitative data**
* **Research 3 qualitative data**
* **Research 7 data reporting**
* **Research 8 evaluating, applying**
* **Research 9 program evaluation**
* **Learner Centered 1 school culture, climate**
* **Principalship 6 role in student discipline**

**Supporting Research**

Discipline is probably the most difficult and unpleasant part of any educator's job. When instructors effectively communicate rules, set high expectations and provided frequent feedback, the need for discipline will likely be infrequent. However, action is occasionally required to correct a situation where a student has broken the rules or is not putting in the required amount of effort. The approach taken to the disciplinary action often determines its effectiveness. Many traditional approaches to discipline are negative, punitive and reactive, which result in bad feelings for all parties involved. A positive approach to discipline involves a process designed to solve performance problems and encourage good performance. The basic theory behind the positive discipline approach is that when a student is treated as an adult who must solve a problem, rather than as a child who must be punished, the student is more likely to respond positively and correct the problem.

Well before any disciplining action is required, there must be acceptance and understanding of the rules of conduct and the disciplinary system by both teachers and students. Students should know exactly what is expected of them and what the consequences will be if they do not meet those expectations. The rules should be consistent and fair. The discipline system will be more effective when there is consistency between teachers.

An article in Teaching Resources states for discipline to be effective, it should:

* Emphasize correcting the problem rather that distributing punishment.
* Maintain the student's self-esteem and dignity.
* Provide for increasingly serious consequences if the problem is not resolved.
* Be easy for the teacher to administer and evaluate.
* Result in the desired behavioral change in the student.

www.ndt-ed.org/TeachingResources/.../Effective\_Discipline.htm‎

Recognition that school is a learning place: Repeatedly, school systems are stressing that schools are a place for learning, not a recreation/social center for students. Once this "learning atmosphere" is established and enforced, schools have a lower percentage of discipline problems. I have heard too many times that we need to give students more choices, more freedom, or less responsibility and I disagree with these ideas. It is a school and we need to create a positive learning environment where students feel safe and welcomed.

Basically, school discipline has become lax over the years as our relationships have weakened. Consolidated school systems and mega schools have made the separation between family and school wider than ever. These mega schools have largely ignored the local community. Also, some parents have lost touch with their children for many different reasons.

Sherry H. Bowen wrote the article called Discipline in School: What Works and What Doesn't, and says for school discipline to be successful, we need to restore those relationships. Parents and schools need to work together to instill the importance of education into children of all ages. Finding discipline procedures that work is a job for students, parents, and teachers to explore together. In today's society, working together within the school and community will help teach children that working as a team can effectively solve the problem.

Middle school discipline problems prevent teachers from teaching and keep kids from learning. The Virginian-Pilot April 16, 2013states that Norfolk's middle schools have implemented a program to reduce those discipline problems by approaching them like any other school subject, with measures of and rewards for success.The protocol, called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, requires teachers to create lesson plans and monitor progress toward good behavior. The model was developed in the 1990s by researchers at the University of Oregon to deal with students with behavioral disorders but quickly gained recognition for its results with all students. It's now employed by more than 16,000 schools, including 360 in Virginia.It works by setting standards of behavior, ensuring that students and teachers understand expectations, rewarding good behavior and clearly defining violations and their consequences.Clearly, punitive discipline alone has failed to correct behavioral problems in the city's middle schools.

As The Pilot's Clay Barbour reported, nearly 40 percent of the division's incidents came from Norfolk's middle schools from 2009 to 2012.Students knew what constituted bad behavior, because so many of their peers wound up suspended or in detention. Middle schools became warehouses for weak teachers, according to an independent assessment of the district, with further deterioration of learning because those teachers had little support.

Without question, education on appropriate behavior in any setting begins at home. Schools cannot substitute for parents to instill courtesy, respect and discipline. However, kids spend most of their daylight hours in school. Setting behavioral standards, requiring students to adhere to them and reinforcing that code of conduct through recognition and reward cannot be separated from successful education.

When we help the students develop self-discipline through a consistent, coherent discipline system, we show them that we care about their lives, not just their grades or test scores. . <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct12/vol70/num02/Five-Myths-About-Student-Discipline.aspx>

My goal is to help all teachers provide the same support to our students that expert teacher-disciplinarians provide. As administrators, we can't manage teachers' classrooms—but we can provide a system that supports teachers in their efforts to create a safe space for learning

**So What?**

The exact numbers of students who have served in the VIC study hall and receive special education services is 18%. That number may not be astronomically huge, but it is big enough to raise some concern and warrants a discussion with our special education staff and administration. Although we already have alternative steps in place, like a check in check out policy, it never hurts to keep collecting data and reducing that number We are having a positive impact on students for their choices they make during the school day. After serving in the room for a couple of weeks I have found that it is a great place to reach out to students and get some one on one time. As I mentioned earlier, the staff member gets the opportunity to discuss why the student is in VIC and what they could have done differently to avoid the VIC placement. I have also talked to members of the student body and being put into VIC is definitely not something that the kids want or enjoy. For what started as a pilot project from our new principal and has really gained the support of the staff and the students. I believe it will deter them and help to make better choices in the future.

With the harassment forms and data, it is a difficult situation and a lot depends on the student reporting and the offense that has been committed. Bullying is a buzz word that is very hard to prove or define. So it is very difficult to determine if a student is directing their behavior directly at another student or if the behavior is more generalized. I do believe that all of the reported cases are important and need to be addressed and in a timely manner, but I also believe that getting the student body to change their attitudes about bullying would be much more effective in the long run. If we can get the bystanders to stand up for others and stop the poor behavior of a few, the culture and environment would be forever changed. A work in progress!